

The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has become the deadliest in the country's history, with 2,325 deaths reported since it was declared in May, government data showed Sunday.

Confirmed cases have reached 4,945, including 101 new infections recorded in the previous 24 hours, according to Congo's public health institute.

The death toll has surpassed the 2,299 fatalities recorded during the country's 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak, which had previously been the deadliest outbreak on record.

The current outbreak, Congo's 17th, is also the country's largest by the number of confirmed cases, passing the previous record in late July.

The outbreak has been difficult to contain as health authorities contend with weak health infrastructure, insecurity and resistance from some communities, all of which have complicated surveillance, contact tracing and access to treatment.

The outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo species of Ebola, for which there are no approved vaccines or treatments. Several experimental vaccines and therapies are being evaluated, while researchers are also studying whether existing Ebola treatments could offer protection.

The proportion of confirmed patients who have died has risen to 46%, from about 20% in early June, according to government data.

Health experts say the increase does not necessarily mean the virus has become more lethal. Instead, it could indicate that many infections are being detected late, when patients have fewer chances of surviving.

"Normally, as an outbreak progresses, the case fatality ratio should fall as contact tracing improves and patients are identified and treated earlier," said Thomas Parisch, a public health specialist deployed to Congo with Médecins Sans Frontières.

Many cases are still being identified late, sometimes only after patients die in their communities, he said.

The scale of the outbreak is now second only to the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which recorded 28,616 cases and 11,310 deaths across Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to the World Health Organization.

The virus earlier spread to neighboring Uganda, where authorities recorded 20 confirmed cases and two deaths before declaring the outbreak over last month.

Ebola spreads through direct contact with bodily fluids of infected people, living or dead. Symptoms include fever, vomiting and diarrhea and, in severe cases, internal and external bleeding.